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ABSTRACT

The ideas collected in this twentieth edition of "Ideas Plus" come from two sources: ideas submitted at an Idea Exchange session at a National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention or Spring Conference, and contributions by readers of "Classroom Notes Plus" and "Ideas Plus." Some of the teaching practices described in this book are innovative and surprising, while others are adaptations on familiar ideas. Classroom teachers may wish to customize these approaches for their students. Ideas suggested in the book are grouped into the following three sections: (1) Prewriting and Writing; (2) Literature; and (3) Explorations. Each section contains six or seven ideas for the classroom. Includes an author index and a subject index. (NKA)

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# Ideas Plus
# Book 20

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**Practical Classroom Ideas by Teachers for Teachers**



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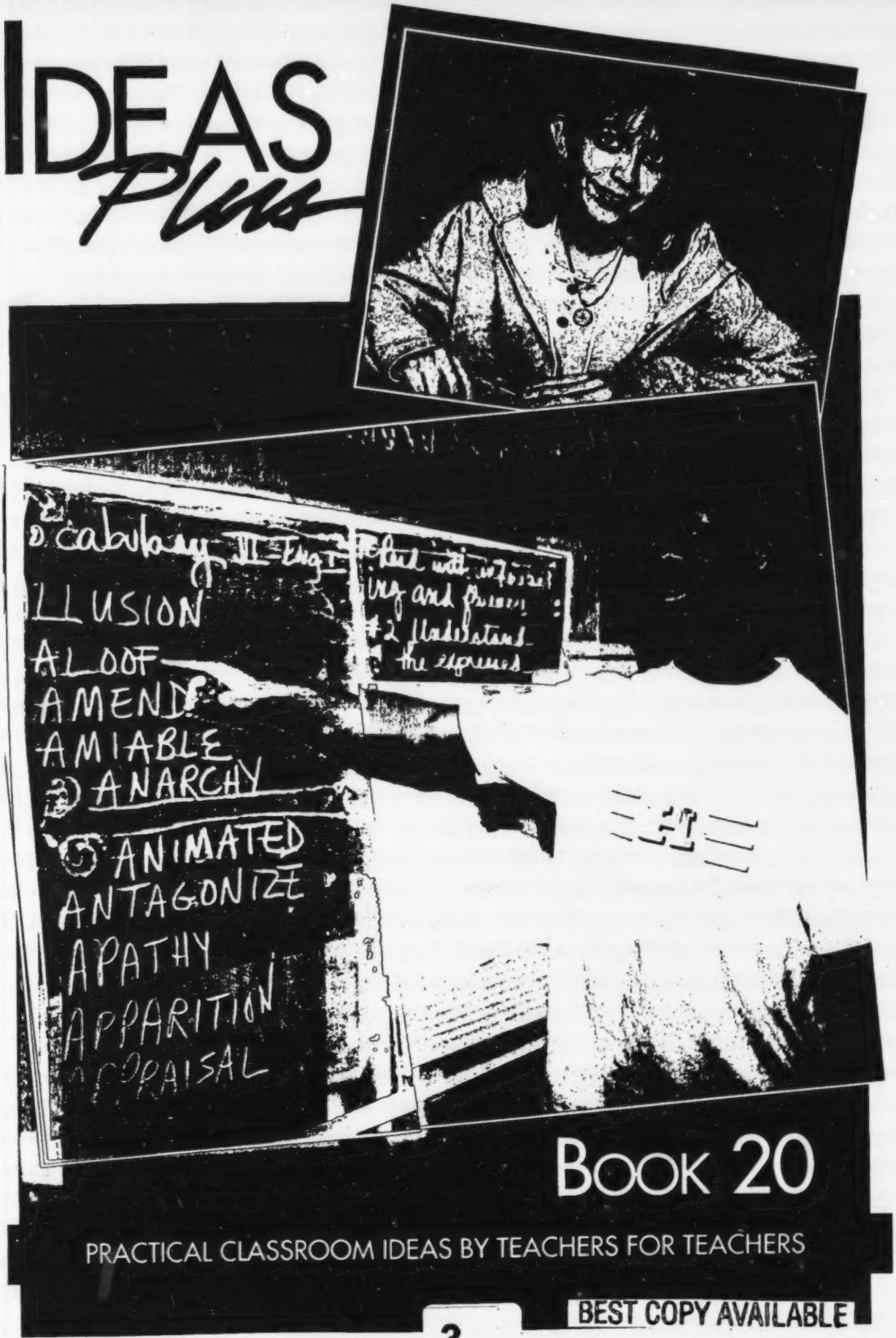


## BOOK 20

PRACTICAL CLASSROOM IDEAS BY TEACHERS FOR TEACHERS

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# IDEAS Plus

A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas

Book Twenty

National Council of Teachers of English
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# Foreword

The ideas collected in this twentieth edition of *Ideas Plus* come from two sources: ideas submitted at an Idea Exchange session at an NCTE Annual Convention or Spring Conference, and contributions by readers of *Classroom Notes Plus* and *Ideas Plus*.

Some of the teaching practices described here are innovative and surprising; others are adaptations on familiar ideas. Your own ingenuity will doubtless come in handy as you customize these approaches for your students.

Feel free to send us a teaching practice of your own to share with NCTE Plus members. Submissions for consideration may be mailed to *Ideas Plus/Classroom Notes Plus*, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096; or sent by e-mail to notesplus@ncte.org.

# 1 Prewriting and Writing

Variety not only adds spice to life, but adds spice to classroom study as well. The teaching activities in this section offer a range of ways to help students improve their writing—from learning about different modes of writing, writing about significant passages in literary works, and experimenting with sentence formats, to writing about symbolism, quieting one's inner critic, and thinking more clearly about organization in writing.

## The Creative Monster Story: Silencing the Critic Within

In order to help free my students from their fears and insecurities about writing, I designed a series of lessons that evolved into a short story assignment I call the Creative Monster Story—A Way to Silence the Internal Critic.

This idea evolved from my own work with my writing process and the use of Julia Cameron's book, *The Artist's Way.*

The creative monster, or internal critic, does not only apply to writing—it is that imagined voice which seems to tell a person that they are no good at something, and that they might as well not even try. Sometimes this voice stems from a time in our past when someone said something discouraging or critical to us, and we accept that negative message and internalize it as fact.

For the purposes of our exercise, I tell students that they can think of this critical voice as coming from within or coming from outside, and for who don't feel they have a critical inner voice about writing, I encourage them to think of other art forms where they might have felt their creative process was criticized or discouraged by a critical internal or external voice—whether drama, music, or art. Students can also relate this exercise to sports, to hobbies, and to other endeavors,

by thinking generally of a time when someone told them they weren't good at something they liked to do.

I begin by using a series of exercises based around drama and visual art to help students define who and what is their creative monster. I read a passage from page 83 of Anne Lamont's *Bird by Bird* that discusses silencing the internal critic. As a class, we discuss times in our lives when negative critics silenced us in the creative process.

Next, students work together in small groups to perform as "frozen statues," selecting moments when they felt they were silenced in the creative process, and showing the emotions and actions of these moments as if they were frozen moments in time.

As a class, we discuss the frozen statues as they are presented: What emotions are present in the performance? How does this vignette show someone being silenced? What actions gave you this message?

The next day, students are given an assignment—to draw an abstract representation of a moment when a critic silenced them in the creative process. Students are to use color and shape to represent the moment, rather than representational pictures.

I start this exercise by having students close their eyes and picture a time when they were silenced in the creative process. I ask them to think about where they were, who was there, what was taking place, and what emotion they were feeling.

Second, I ask students to focus on the emotions. What color would the emotion be? What shape would it be? Students open their eyes and without talking, draw the emotion they were feeling.

Again, I emphasize that they are to focus on the emotions they are feeling in color and shapes, not recognizable pictures. After students are finished with their pictures, we discuss their choices—why they chose the colors and shapes they did, and what is being represented.

After these two warm-up exercises, students are ready to write. I ask students to keep their abstract pictures handy for inspiration, and I hand out the brainstorming guide shown below.

### *A Brainstorming Guide to Help You Write Your Creative Monster Story*

All of us have creative monsters—those monsters that tell us we can't write, can't draw, can't sing, can't dance, can't participate in life. It's important to silence our creative monsters because they prevent us from exploring our talents and trying anything new. I espe-

## The Yellow Frisbee: Teaching Modes of Writing

As I start my year with freshmen, I often use this simple lesson to introduce the various modes of writing we will be exploring throughout the year.

In our state of Pennsylvania, this exercise also serves well to prepare students for the Pennsylvania State Writing Assessment, a state test requiring students to be able to write for different purposes.

I begin by holding up a yellow frisbee which looks like a big smiley face (you can use any rather innocuous playful object that is relatively simple). My instructions are concise and direct: "Write about this object." When my students badger, "are we supposed to write a story" or "how are we supposed to write," I keep repeating, "write *about* this object."

After about ten minutes has passed, I call on volunteers to read their writing. We listen for a while and then I say, "there are basically four ways you can write about something." I put up a transparency with the following information printed on it:

### Modes of Writing

**Description** describes a person, place, object or event. Descriptive details are sensory details which help the reader to see, hear, touch, smell, and taste what the writer describes.

**Narration** tells a story. While writing narration, you may use description or some explanation, but the main purpose is to tell what happened. Good narration has a conflict, a reason to tell the story. Events in a narrative are often arranged in *time* order. Good narrative paragraphs contain details about the events that make readers feel they are experiencing them.

**Exposition** gives information or an explanation. When you explain something in writing, you make things easier to understand. Exposition is developed with details such as illustrations, facts and data that help support the purpose of the writing.

**Persuasion** convinces others to believe or behave in a certain

cially want to help all of you silence the creative monster that discourages you from writing. You can all be writers!

Your task is to write a one- to two-page creative fairy tale in which you silence your creative monster. Use the following questions to help guide your story.

Brainstorm about your creative monsters. Who in your life has ever told you that you couldn't write, draw, act, sing, or dance? Was it a friend? a brother? a sister? teacher? parent? What did the person say? How did you react?

Setting—Where will your story take place? Are you in an enchanted forest? in a haunted cottage? in a tall dark tower?

Briefly outline ideas for what you might have happen to your creative monster in your story. This may change as you begin writing.

What happens first?

What happens next?

What happens to your creative monster in the end?

You are now ready to begin writing your story. Good luck, and enjoy silencing your creative monster!

To provide a model for students, I often read an example of a creative monster story I wrote. My story focuses on when I was in middle school and sang in the school choir. One day my best friend turned to me and told me that I couldn't sing. In my story, I turn my friend to stone and become the best singer in the choir class. . . .

I find that after the exercises and filling out the brainstorming sheet, most students are ready to write. The room fills with the sound of scribbling and whispers of "You gotta read this." And students love to read their final writings—proof in itself that they've managed to quell their inner critics.

At the end of the semester, I give students a time for final reflections on their writing process and growth over the semester.

The majority of the students respond that although they didn't like writing at the beginning of the semester, they have learned that it can be fun. The creative monster story always tops their list of favorite assignments.

***Mindy Hardwick, Chrysalis Independent School, Woodinville, Washington***

## The Yellow Frisbee: Teaching Modes of Writing

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**Exposition** gives information or an explanation. When you explain something in writing, you make things easier to understand. Exposition is developed with details such as illustrations, facts and data that help support the purpose of the writing.

**Persuasion** convinces others to believe or behave in a certain

way. When you write to persuade, you write to prove a point, to change someone's opinion, or to clarify an issue.

We examine the various modes together and begin to categorize how students have written about the object.

Since I always write when my students write, I usually choose to write an informative piece ("To throw a frisbee requires coordination. First, you stand in an upright position. . . .") or a persuasive piece ("There is no better aerobic exercise than throwing a frisbee.").

While we talk about the writing, I can use my frisbee as a vehicle to demonstrate throwing or catching, as a prop for a commercial to demonstrate persuasive writing, as an object in a story about a frisbee or as simply something to look to explore writing specific details of description.

The lesson is fun, visually appealing, and adds a sense of play to the writing classroom in addition to demonstrating for them the various modes of writing.

***Ellen H. Campbell, State College Area High School South, State College, Pennsylvania***

## Collaborative Reverse Outline

The reverse outline is a handy tool to help writers think more clearly about organization. The following format is that used at the Portland State University Writing Center—I've adapted it with a collaborative element to use with pairs of students after they have developed first drafts of essays.

Here are the instructions for pairs of students:

### *Guidelines for Collaborative Reverse Outline*

1. Make a reverse outline of your paper on index cards using the following steps:
   a. Number the paragraphs in your essay draft.
   b. For each paragraph, think of a single sentence that sums up what you are saying. (If you can't summarize the main idea of the paragraph in one sentence, you may have too many ideas

in the paragraph.)

c. Using a separate index card for each paragraph, write the paragraph number on the back of the card, and the sentences that summarizes it on the front.

d. Create an index card for each paragraph in your essay.

2. Mix up the order of your index cards and exchange them with your partner.
3. Without looking at the original paragraph numbers, arrange your partner's cards in the order that makes the most sense to you.
4. Give the cards, in their new order, back to the writer. Look at how your partner's organization of your essay differs from yours (if it does). Discuss with your peer why he or she organized your essay in this way. Do some points follow more logically from others? Do certain paragraphs provide background or examples for other ideas? Are there other reasons to structure the essay differently?
5. When revising your essay, think about your partner's input and decide whether you want to incorporate any of his or her suggestions into your revised draft.

This exercise can be an effective way to help students improve their writing and learn from one another. Students should also be prepared to explain their final decisions in writing conferences with the teacher or other students.

***Jean Gritter, Sunset High School, Portland, Oregon***

## Using Local Color to Color Students' Writing

My students often have difficulty understanding how to use specific language in their writing, or even why they should. This exercise helped them to see the merits of detail.

First, we read stories by Rudolfo Anaya and Tony Hillerman—two local authors who use our region, the Southwest, as the setting for their writing. After the reading, we talked about the sorts of details the authors used in these writings to create the settings. (Every region has its own talented authors, but not all have writing styles that include vivid details of setting, so keep this in mind when you seek out one or

more local authors to use with your students.)

Next we read a New England folk tale such as "The Devil and Tom Walker." We discussed the details that were used in the New England tale to create a sense of setting, talk about how they were appropriate to that region, and then about how those details differed from the ones used by Anaya and Hillerman.

At this point, I gave students the assignment of reading folk tales from at least two different cultures. We used books from our library's series of folk tales from different countries. Many such books are available, and there are also folktale resources available on the World Wide Web.

For example, the Tales of Wonder Web site at http://www.darsie.net/talesofwonder/ presents folk and fairy tales from around the world.

You'll also find a listing of American folktales presented by region on the American folklore site at http://www.americanfolklore.net/rr.html, and folktales and ghost stories of the American South are presented at http://www.themoonlitroad.com.

Next students chose one folk tale and rewrote it, but set this time in the Southwest. They changed characters' names and added details such as deserts, arroyos, and cloudless blue skies. They even occasionally had their characters speak a few words in Spanish.

Students read their stories aloud in class. The class discussed the details that were most telling, those that they recognized as being specific to where they live and what they experience, and that created a vivid picture of our region.

Finally we posted the stories on the bulletin board so that other classes could read them. Not only were the students interested in reading each other's stories and looking for names, places, and details that they recognized, but they were eager to point out those specifics in their own writing.

These stories were the best writing examples these classes had turned in up to that point. This assignment helped students become generally more aware of the value of detail in a piece of writing, and their use of detail seemed to improve in later assignments.

Although this exercise might still be effective if it were not centered on writings and setting details from the students' own region, the local aspect is valuable because it helps motivate students and lets them write about what they know.

***Lyn C. Howell, Milligan College, Milligan, Tennessee***

## The Search for Snazzier Sentences

Many of my middle school students need to learn to write with a greater variety of sentence formats. To inspire them and give them confidence, I spend time early in the year helping them practice with some possible sentence-beginning patterns.

I focus on the seven patterns below, to provide variety without overwhelming the students.

### Some Patterns for Beginning Sentences

1. adjective conjunction adjective

   Example: **Hot and sweaty,** the boxer answered the reporter's questions.

2. an appositive

   Example: Luke, **the star player,** broke his arm in the last regular season game.

3. prepositional phrase

   Example: **From the shattered window,** the abandoned kitten watched the girls.

4. "Ing" word

   Example: **Laughing,** the student admitted to the prank.

5. two adjectives

   Example: **Sleek, shiny** cars lined the sidewalk next to the parade route.

6. adverb conjunction adverb

   Example: **Slowly and carefully,** the fireman placed the child in his mother's arms.

7. "Ing" conjunction "Ing"

   Example: **Smiling and laughing,** the boys flirted with the cheerleaders.

To begin, I distribute a 5" x 8" index card to each student. I use the

overhead to display the list of sentence patterns and ask students to copy them onto their cards.

Then I display a sample sentence; together we come up with an example of a sentence that uses this pattern and a student volunteer writes it on the board. I also ask students to write an example of their own creation on their card under that sentence pattern.

We continue to do this for each sentence pattern, and students keep their completed cards in their writing folders for reference throughout the year.

Students frequently use these patterns in their writing, not only when revising, but also in their first drafts.

After a while, they don't even need to refer to the card, and better yet, this sort of practice helps them become aware of the variety of sentence patterns in the language they hear and read, so that they feel comfortable experimenting with their own variations as they write.

***Dana Humphrey, Fort Zumwalt North Middle School, O'Fallon, Missouri***

## Object and Identity

This assignment helps students develop an awareness of symbolism by asking them to explain the symbolism of an object related to their lives.

It also provides practice in presentation skills, and has the added benefit of helping the teacher get to know the students better, especially when used near the beginning of the school year.

I have successfully used this activity with middle and high school students as a pre-reading assignment before we read Alice Walker's short story "Everyday Use."

However, the lesson can be adapted to any literary work with a character who owns a special possession that represents himself or herself.

I explain it to students this way:

> In the story we are about to read, Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," the main characters own a quilt made by their grandmother, and their feelings about this quilt help to define their identities to the readers. The cultural significance of the quilt also becomes apparent through the story. We can often see reflections of our own iden-

tities in the possessions we value, and, in some cases, certain objects can even symbolize us.

Your assignment is as follows:

1. Find an object that helps to define your identity. Choose something related to your family or cultural heritage if possible or appropriate. Choose something that is special to you and that has meaning to you. Bring this object to class or, if that's not possible or convenient, bring a photograph or sketch of the actual object.
2. Show your object to the class and explain the significance of the object. Describe what it is and what it means to you. Be sure to explain how it relates to your identity, who you are.
3. Turn in two paragraphs explaining the significance of your object. In the first paragraph, describe your object, telling what it is and what it looks like. Use specific details about size, shape and color. In the second paragraph, explain how this object shows your identity. How is this object related to who you are? How can this object be used as a symbol for you? Why is this object special to you?

Here's an example that I wrote:

I wear my engagement ring on the third finger of my left hand. It is a green, oval-cut emerald flanked by two smaller diamonds, one on each side. The band is gold, and it narrows as it approaches the diamonds. Below the engagement ring, I wear my wedding band, which is gold and engraved with a silvery design in the shape of the infinity symbol ringing the entire band.

The rings that I wear symbolize marriage. I only got married two months ago, so my wedding band set is especially important to me as it is a constant reminder of my newly-married state and my husband. It reminds me that I made an important decision to change my life by agreeing to be bonded to someone else for the rest of our lives; I am now half of a unit, and we will be making decisions together rather than my making them all myself. I now have someone else's feelings to consider in everything I do.

The wedding band matches my husband's, which also reminds me of our unity, and the infinity design reminds me of our eternal pledge. The engagement ring's emerald is also my birthstone and represents me more than a diamond, which is the traditional engagement ring stone. Since he knew I have always loved the coolness

and serenity of the color green, and I already had a diamond from my grandmother, my then-fiance chose an emerald especially for me.

My students have enjoyed all aspects of this assignment—the search for just the right object, the writing, the presentation, and follow-up questions from their peers.

The variety of objects and explanations help us get to know one another in a unique and sometimes humorous way, and also help students to understand that, in life as in literature, the association of meaning can make anything a symbol.

***Kristine Marsh, Harriton High School, Lower Merion School District, Rosemont, Pennsylvania***

## The Quotes Project

The Quotes Project is an effective reading and writing project that I pursue with my students. I ask them to read a novel, note significant passages, and follow-up with several different writing assignments.

Here's the handout I give to my students:

### Handout Page

#### Assignment

Read a fiction title and collect a minimum of at least ten annotated quotes/passages from the novel, in addition to one passage that you designate "The Quote of the Novel" (for a total of at least eleven quotes). Then write a reflective letter about the novel that you read and your reactions to both it and the annotated passages that you assembled.

#### Procedures

Use sticky notes to mark passages as you read. Every time you encounter a particularly important, provocative, dramatic, surprising, even disturbing passage, mark it with a sticky note. Only when you have completed the novel will you look at all those passages and decide which to toss out and which to keep. So when you are done read-

ing your book, you will select at least ten passages from throughout the novel. Copy the passages down (including page numbers) and then write about each passage in the following ways:

1. First, in a well-written paragraph explain how the passage "fits" into the novel (does the passage add to the character development? to the plot line? to the details of setting? and so forth). Discuss the importance of the passage to the book's message or meaning or theme.

2. Then, in another well-written paragraph, react to the passage as a reader. Make me understand *why* you have selected this passage. To generate responses, you can consider the following as suggested prompts or questions:

   Why does the passage impress, intrigue, horrify, or puzzle you?

   Do you find the author's use of language appealing or powerful? Does the passage jump off the page as a great descriptive passage?

   Does it prompt a strong response from you as you read it? Does it present itself as so well-crafted that you just love the sound of it? Is the language beautiful, descriptive, graphic?

   Is it particularly meaningful? Is it a highpoint in the book? Do you find yourself in agreement/ disagreement with the ideas expressed?

   Does the passage remind you of a situation you have lived as well?

   Does the passage make you laugh out loud or make you melancholy or make you something else? Does the author or the character raise intriguing questions or issues?

   Does the passage challenge or expand your thinking?

   You are not limited to the above list, nor do I expect you to answer all of the above. But, your responses to the passages should clearly explain to me *why* these passages mean something to you, *why* these passages caught your attention.

3. Next, select another, different, passage as "The Quote of the Book." "The Quote of the Book" is that one passage or quote that captures the essence—the true meaning—of the novel for you, the reader. In a well-written paragraph explain exactly *how*

this passage is the one perfect quote from the book. [Think of this as the one passage that you would absolutely want saved should your book ever be lost or destroyed.]

4. Lastly, write me a reflective letter about reading this novel and creating your quotes paper. Write to me about the thoughts and feelings and observations and new insights you experienced while reading your novel. Write to me about marking the quotes as you read and then selecting the ones to keep. Some things to think about for your letter may include, but are not exclusive to, the following:

   Tell me what you worked on the hardest or struggled with in doing this assignment.

   Share with me what you think you did well: what worked, really worked.

   Show me where you were drawn into the novel and where you were pulled away from the novel.

   Identify in your opinion the author's—or the story's—greatest strength and weakness.

   Explain some the reasons that you chose this novel.

   Discuss in what ways is the novel similar to your life.

   Explore what value, besides entertainment, this book has.

   Share your overall impressions of the novel.

   Discuss if you found yourself changing your mind about the book and/or the assignment.

   Tell me what you as a reader and as a student need to focus on for the next assignment.

   Your reflective letter is your chance to "talk" with me about your book, your project, and your experiences in completing this assignment. With your letter, make me see your work—and your learning—through your eyes.

## Important Points

- All aspects of this assignment must be typed.
- Passages/quotes must be *at least* two sentences long. Your collection of passages should include many that are longer than two

sentences.

- Passages/quotes must be taken from throughout the entire novel.
- All passages must be in quotation marks—and be sure to copy the passage exactly as it appears in your novel.
- All passages must include the page number from which they are taken. Cite page numbers in parenthesis, like this: (235).
- This assignment is due on the day it is due—late penalties will be given.
- The reflective letter is a required component of this assignment.

This project engages students by making them responsible for selecting passages and ideas that interest them, and then asks them to think about these passages and express themselves in writing.

In addition to providing valuable experience in responding to reading, it also provides good material for class discussion, and gives students a chance to share their favorite passages from books they've read and exchange their views, criticisms, and reactions.

***Anne J. Arvidson, Exeter-West Greenwich High School, West Greenwich, Rhode Island***

# 2 LITERATURE

By introducing our students to literature, we open the door to knowledge, self-understanding, enjoyment, language enrichment, and tolerance of others. The following classroom strategies will help enhance your students reading, as they explore literary elements and poetry, discuss issues raised by their reading, take a close look at character development, and more.

## Poems for Two Voices Based on *The Outsiders*

Inspired by Paul Fleischman's delightful book *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* (HarperCollins Juvenile Books), I developed this activity to use with my eighth graders as we finished up a unit on S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders,* always a favorite with this age group. It involves students in a poetry writing and performance activity that leads into our usual essay assignment on conflict in the novel.

I started with a discussion of external and internal conflict and then put up the following labels on the board: *man vs. man, man vs. society, man vs. himself, man vs. nature.*

Students were given a chance to write under the labels any conflicts from the book that seemed to fit. Under *man vs. man* they wrote things like *socs vs. greasers, Darry vs. Ponyboy, Cherry vs. Dally,* and *Johnny vs. his parents.* Under *man vs. society,* they came up with *greasers vs. the law* and *Dally vs. the law.* One student also mentioned that the three brothers are against society because after their parents' death, they are in conflict with the social services people. My students decided that the only example of man vs. nature was the fire in the church when Johnny was critically injured.

For the next step, I gave students a prompt called the "I Am" poem, which is a popular format I've used for many years to encourage per-

sonal reflection.

It consists of the following three stanzas, each line starting with only two words. Students copied the three stanzas two times, once on the front and once on the back of a sheet of paper, then picked two characters from *The Outsiders* who were in conflict with each other from our list on the board and completed the poem from the viewpoint of each of the characters.

## Format for the "I Am" poem

*First Stanza*
I am
I wonder
I hear
I see
I want
I am

*Second Stanza*
I pretend
I feel
I touch
I worry
I cry
I am

*Third Stanza*
I understand
I say
I dream
I try
I hope
I am

As I read students' responses to this activity, it occurred to me that what they had written cried out to be presented orally as partner poems. So I handed the responses back the next day and asked students to choose partners, read each other's poems, select the best one, and prepare to present it as a partner poem. The results were fantastic!

Students who were normally reluctant performers volunteered to get up and share their writings. They read lines alternately and whenever both characters said the same thing, they read them together. Here are

some of the poems they created, shown in the two-voice format:

I am a greaser, a hood, a person
I wonder if I will live to see another day
I hear yelling, gun shots and screaming
I see fights, killings and other horrible things
I want to be normal
I am a greaser, a hood, a person

I am a soc, a prep, a big shot
I wonder what will happen tomorrow
I hear greasers yelling for mercy
I see them bruised and cut up
I want to be normal
I am a soc, a prep, and a big shot

I am Darry
I wonder if I'll ever go to college
I hear the greasers and fuzz fighting it out
I see the pain in my brother's eyes
I want for Pony to grow up successful
I am a greaser

I am Ponyboy
I wonder who I really am
I hear the name "greaser" too many times
I see myself turning into a hood
I want something better than this life
I am not sure of myself.

When it was time to write their final essays on conflict in *The Outsiders*, students were ready. Words flowed easily because of the "prewriting" they had already done.

The assignment could end there, but in my class, we took it a step further. I asked students to use the "I Am" format and respond with their own thoughts to create a personal reflection.

Then we took informal closeup photographs of each student using a digital camera, downloaded the images, and students placed the images behind their typed poems using Appleworks.

The format was nothing fancy—students just typed and saved their poems, then "inserted" the photo and sent it to the "back." The image was large enough so that a face filled up the letter-size paper. Careful cropping is important. Sometimes the words have to be reversed to white or gray to show up on the photo. We also played with the flush left and flush right buttons to get the best placement. Teachers and students with access to PhotoShop could even experiment with filters to make the photos resemble sketches, watercolors, or oil paintings.

My students finished their poems and photos right before the final Awards Assembly/Eighth Grade Promotion and posted them on the library glass wall by our entrance. The eye-catching photos stopped parents in their tracks, and they lingered to read many of the poems. Full of teen angst and deep thoughts, the poems were a perfect compliment to the students' end-of-the-year photos.

***Cindy Reese Payne, Waynesville Middle School, Waynesville, Missouri***

## Metaphors, Similes, Personification, and Sandra Cisneros

This exercise helps students identify and practice the use of simile, metaphor, and personification, with a focus on Sandra Cisneros's story, "Eleven." Here is the handout I give to my students to explain the assignment:

### *Guidelines for Students*

Writers use literary techniques such as similes, metaphors, and personification to make abstract ideas more concrete and to create a vivid image for the reader.

**Simile**—A simile is a comparison between two different things, using a phrase containing the word "like," "as," or "than." Here are some well-known examples of similes

as stubborn as a mule

my love is like a red red rose

faster than lightening

**Metaphor**—a metaphor is also a comparison, but it does not use any actual comparison words. Here are some familiar examples of metaphors:

This place is a madhouse.

Life is a bowl of cherries.

"All the world's a stage" (from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*)

**Personification**—Personification is the attribution of human qualities to objects or abstract notions. Here are some examples:

The darkness falls from the wings of night

The tiny house stood its ground defiantly on the windy cliff.

The sunflower lorded his brilliance over the pale daisy.

### Assignment

Here are four examples from Sandra Cisneros' story "Eleven." Label each one according to whether it is metaphor, simile, or per-

sonification, and then describe what you think each phrase means.

1. _____ "eleven years rattling inside me like pennies in a tin Band-Aid box."

Describe what you think this phrase means:

_____

2. _____ "the way you grow old is kind of like an onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk or like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other. . ."

Describe what you think this phrase means:

_____

3. _____ "some days you might say something stupid and that's the part of you that's still ten"

Describe what you think this phrase means:

_____

4. _____ "all the years inside me are pushing at the back of my eyes"

Describe what you think this phrase means:

_____

## Your Turn

Now it is your turn to get literary. You will receive an object and it is your job to turn the object into a metaphor, a simile, and an example of personification.

Compare the object to *life* as in this example:

**Object:** A compass

**Metaphor:** Life is a compass. The needle points north but it is a life task to follow the arrow.

**Simile:** Life is like a compass; influenced by passing iron filings and deeply buried ore.

**Personification:** The compass pulls me north.

A greater challenge would be to extend a life metaphor or simile more fully into a paragraph or poem. Here is an example to "prime the pump":

Life is a piece of bubble gum. It starts off
Fresh and juicy, with plenty of zip
And gallons of give, and a million bubbles just waiting
To be popped!
But then, the taste goes sour and turns to glue.
It sticks to your teeth and tightens your jaws.
And the only thing to do is toss it in the trash.

To prepare for this exercise, I assemble all the desired objects in a large bag. I collect one or two objects for each student in the class. Here is a list of possible objects:

book of matches
measuring spoon
measuring tape
shoe horn
bar of soap
compass
book
skateboard
stapler
pillow
pen
calculator
empty box
dice
deck of cards
paperweight
clothes pin
spool of thread
wooden spoon
whistle
greeting card
Lifesavers

I let each student reach into the bag and select an item. Then I ask students to write an example of a simile, metaphor, and personifica-

tion for their item, and then to share their examples with a partner. The process may be repeated with a new object, if time allows.

Then I read aloud Sandra Cisneros's short story "Eleven." I ask students to identify and discuss the examples Cisneros uses in her story and the effect of these literary techniques on the reader. Applying these new concepts to Cisneros's story helps students to grasp them immediately. For extra credit, I sometimes let students try an "extended version" like the example above.

***Lucinda Boswell, La Puente High School, La Puente, California***

## Poetry Made Public: The "Read-Aloud"

When I taught at the eighth-grade level, a colleague of mine, Mike Garaghty, passed on many good teaching techniques, including many good strategies based on the Hilda Taba methods of teaching. This is one such technique, which Mike recommended for helping students enjoy poetry.

Though I don't use this "read aloud" technique with my current college-level students, I remember with great fondness how well it worked in eighth grade classrooms, and I continue to teach it to my adolescent literature students as a great teaching strategy.

Here's how it works: Each class of students needs to have access to a good selection of readable poems. If you have twenty-five students, you'll need fifty or so poems. The poems in your classroom anthology will work, though you may supplement from other sources.

It's helpful to have copies enough for all students to look at. From this selection, each student will pick one that they will prepare to read aloud for the class: you can post a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board, so later selectors know what's left. When their turn comes to present their poem, the student needs to name its title and author, say a little bit about why they picked the poem, what they especially like about it, and/or what they think are the best lines or images, and then read it aloud to the class.

In two or so class periods, while individuals are selecting and practicing their own poems, the class will practice together on a smaller sampling of poems. I do some modeling, we do some choral reading,

and I ask solo volunteers to read selections, while we all learn these basic principles about reading poetry:

1. Read a poem as you would prose—by *sentences* rather than lines.
2. Observe *enjambment;* that is, do not pause or drop the voice until a phrase or thought breaks.
3. Read rhymed poetry without stressing the rhyming words and without overstressing the rhythm.
4. Read meaningfully (not necessarily dramatically, but with appropriate sensitivity to key words, comfortable pace, meaningful pauses) and enunciate clearly (but not stiltedly—students need to know that it's okay to pronounce the article "uh" rather than "aye," for example).
5. Learn to "read" punctuation—that is, to use its various signals as guidelines. Learn, for example, that the voice drops in pitch at a period, raises in pitch at a question mark, maintains steady pitch at a colon.
6. Look up words that you don't know how to pronounce or don't know the meaning of.

During these all-class "training sessions" I establish the criteria (those listed above) on which their reading will be assessed, and I playfully introduce the kind of coaching I will do.

I may "read badly" myself or ask the volunteer readers to "read badly" and then ask someone else to read aloud, showing us how to do better. I may ask students to read in an exaggerated singsong fashion to hear more clearly why the rhythm needs to be made more subtle. We use choral reading to help everybody feel comfortable reading aloud and to feel where basic rhythm and pauses fall, and we stop to talk about where phrases begin and end.

In this process we learn things about punctuation, about sentence structure, and about finding the key words in lines of poetry. We don't talk much at all about "what this poem means," but, in figuring out where to put the "right" phrase breaks, we often have to talk about what individual sentences mean and how they break into grammatical and syntactical units (though I don't use those terms).

I interrupt many readings to ask readers to read louder, softer, faster, slower, in a higher or lower speaking voice, or with a different emotional framework ("be more scared" "be more happy"). Sometimes, in order to help us figure out what the "right tone" for the reading should

be, we stop to talk about who it is who's speaking in this poem, who is being addressed, and for what purpose the poem is said or delivered to this listener.

Before we start the individual readings, I warn students that I will continue to play the "coach" in the readings and I may ask them to start over, as we've done in the modeling sessions.

So that being asked to read again has a positive purpose, I also tell them that, even if they read the poem perfectly, I will ask them to read at least a part of it over in a different way—sometimes just to explore different possibilities of tone and feeling.

I may also establish listeners' roles. Students should have copies of the poems to be read in front of them (or projected on transparencies or power point). They should think of questions to ask the reader; they should try to figure out the narrative situation, the age/gender/purpose/situation of the narrator, they should identify parts they like.

Depending on how much time you want to spend on this (and on how large your class is), you may want to assign one or two different individuals to each reader to perform one of these roles after the reading.

I liked to do that as a way to keep the audience on their toes—though I usually kept them on their toes anyway, making them wonder what I might ask next in terms of a "different way" of reading.

Sometimes I asked the reader simply to read "more slowly" or "more elegantly" or "more somberly" or "more nonchalantly."

Sometimes I asked them to play a role: "This time, sit cross-legged on the desk, pretend that you're a kid fishing by the creek"; "Sit in my desk chair and pretend that you're an aging schoolteacher"; "Pretend that you've just lost your love, and walk around the front of the room while you read"; "Read in a crackly voice as though you're really old."

With older students (I've done this with the adolescent lit class) I ask another student, after they've heard the first reading, to think of a different role or dramatic situation for the second.

I was very often amazed at how willingly students—even the very shy and the very untheatrical—took on suggested roles. (The spirit seemed to fulfill Mikhail Bakhtin's argument that dressing up in Carnival costumes enabled the populace of the Middle Ages to get in touch with inner resources otherwise stifled in their diurnal existence.)

And I was always pleased with how attentive the class remained throughout the several days it took to hear everyone's performance.

Both performers and listeners enjoyed the opportunity to see read-

ers improve before their very eyes, to stretch themselves a bit beyond the usual limits of classroom behavior, and, I think, to present good things to others.

Even poor readers can show some noticeable improvement in their oral reading if they're given a *manageable* suggestion about how to read their poem better. The trick is not to make them self-conscious about *reading skills,* but instead to give them some goal you as their teacher think they can handle.

So rather than ask the reluctant reader to read "paying better attention to the punctuation," I might ask this reader to read as though they're very old or very sad." Or "read as though the person you're saying this to is someone you like as much as your favorite dog."

A comfortable request will bring a comfortable response, and when they accomplish even small improvements, the class automatically hears how a more careful reading enhances the meaning of the poem, and they become party both to another's success and to their own better knowledge of how a poem works. Many of these same strategies might be used to encourage students to do better reading of parts in readers' theater.

Now a "veteran" teacher (and one much less inclined to form hasty judgments about my colleagues) I'm more aware of the pedagogical rationale for the success of this technique.

I know, for example, that one huge reason that a lot of students don't like poetry is that they've never learned to read it well or comfortably; they haven't heard much poetry read aloud with ease and good intent; and they're too soon burdened with the need to interpret it rather than enjoy the sound and the feel of it first.

I also think this activity works because students need "permission" to read in a way that consciously emphasizes aspects of text. More than that, they need just a bit of "coercion." I learned from overhearing my eighth-graders "complaining" about how strict their parents were, that those who were held to high standards appreciated the efforts made in their behalf to keep them directed toward productive self-development.

Of course adolescents are afraid of separating themselves from the mundane, but they're capable of being more literate and expressive than they generally permit themselves to be.

So this "read-aloud" assignment provides both permission and prodding into creative expression. And, entering into this form of creative expression takes most students a good step further in their ability to appreciate literature.

### Resources

I found the following resources helpful as I developed this lesson:

"Teaching Poetry" by Deborah Appleman. *Teaching Literature in the Secondary School,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990 (pp. 379–402).

"Philosophical Poetry" by Stephen C. Behrendt. *Instruments of the Bones,* Mid-List Press, 1992 (p. 57).

*Poetry of Relevance* by Homer Hogan. Methuen, 1970.

*An Introduction to Poetry* by X. J. Kennedy. Little Brown, 1971.

*Sound and Sense* by Laurence Perrine. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.

"What Is Not Poetry?" by Karl Shapiro. *In Defense of Ignorance,* Random, 1960 (pp. 263–285).

***Ruth Wood, University of Wisconsin at River Falls***

A version of this article appeared in the Wisconsin English Journal (Spring 2000)

## Songs Illuminate Literary Elements

After struggling to help my eleventh-grade students gain an appreciation for the multiple dimensions of poetry, I found three songs that helped me talk about literary elements such as metaphor and symbolism. The songs I chose, and the elements I used them to illustrate, were as follows:

The Temptations' "Papa Was a Rolling Stone"

TLC's "Waterfalls"

Simon and Garfunkel's "I Am a Rock"

I made the connection between poetry and songs by telling my students that songs are poetry set to music. Here's the approach I took with each song:

### "Papa Was a Rolling Stone"

*Key Lyric: "Papa was a rolling stone /Wherever he laid his hat was his home and/ when he died all he left me was alone."*

I wrote the definition of metaphor and asked students to copy it. The students then listened to the song and picked out descriptions which showed what kind of father the person in the song was. The students then analyzed the song in context of the saying "A rolling stone gathers no moss."

After class discussion, I emphasized that metaphors were used to communicate a wealth of information in a few words. By using that metaphor, the song called to mind the above-mentioned saying and communicated an idea quickly that might have taken paragraphs or stanzas to develop.

## "Waterfalls"

*Key Lyric: "Don't go chasing waterfalls/ Please stick to the rivers and the lakes that/You're used to/ I know that you're gonna have it your way/ Or nothing at all/But I think you're moving too fast."*

I wrote the definition of symbol and asked students to copy it. I drew a chart with three columns on the chalkboard and asked students to describe the difference between a waterfall and lake and a river; I jotted down their ideas on the chart. I then played the song for students and asked them to offer explanations for the symbolism.

## "I Am a Rock"

*Key Lyric: "I am a rock/ I am an island/And the rock feels no pain/ And an island never cries."*

Since we had already talked about metaphor when we discussed "Papa Was a Rolling Stone," this time I asked students to demonstrate their understanding of metaphor by listening to the song and finding and explaining the metaphor on their own. They also had to use lyrics from the song to explain their interpretation.

I also asked them to discuss the metaphor in relation to the idea in John Donne's "Meditation 17," in which he states "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of a continent, a part of the main . . . involved in mankind."

I found it very effective to make connections between songs and literary elements in this way. It illustrates the concepts and engages students in active thinking and discussing, and students who might feel intimidated discussing a poem tend to feel more comfortable talking about songs. And many other literary elements such as personification,

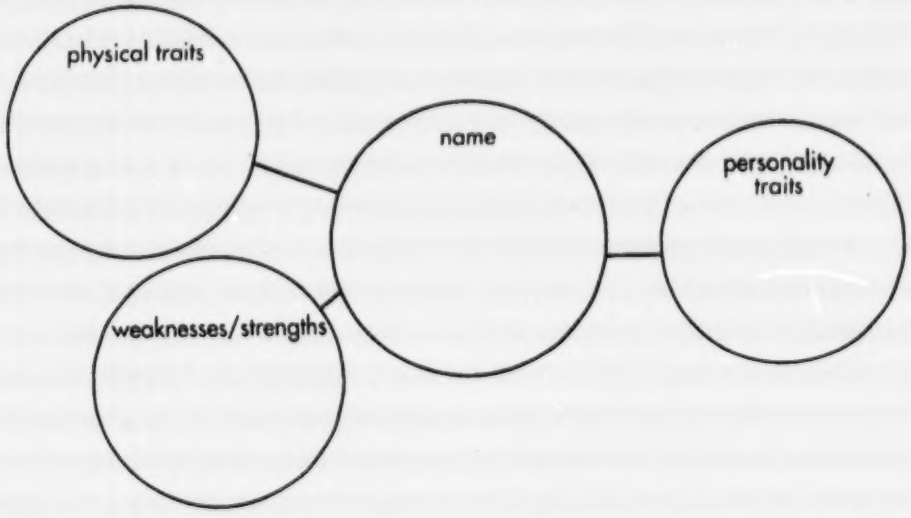
onomatopeia, simile, alliteration, rhythm, and rhyme can easily be found and illustrated through songs. An appropriate follow-up would be to ask students to bring in examples of songs they know, and explain to their peers what literary elements they illustrate.

***Katrina M. Walker, Tucker High School, Tucker, Georgia***

## Preparation for a Character Analysis

I use this exercise to prepare my eighth-grade students to write a character analysis paper, after they have read *The Acorn People* by Ron Jones. The story elements of this book are simple to discover and the characters are memorable, so it's a good book to use for this purpose.

I divide the class into groups of four to five students. Each group travels to six different stations in the room. Each station consists of four desks pushed together to make a large tabletop. At each station I place a box of markers, a novel and a large piece of chart paper. On each sheet of paper, I draw a circle in the middle and place a character's name in it. Branching off I draw three more circles and label them *physical traits, personality traits* and *weaknesses/strengths.*




The student groups then proceed from station to station, responding to the prompts by brainstorming the indicated characteristics and jotting them on the chart. I give these general instructions in advance: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Everyone is to write, and the idea is to build on what has been said by others. There should be no exact duplications. When I announce that it's time to move, students leave the materials (such as books and markers) at that table and move to the next station.

I allow between two and three minutes of writing time at each station. I have all five of my classes do the same novel at the same time, and each class spends one class period on it, so that by the end of one day, I have five charts for each character.

On the second day, each student chooses one character for the analysis. I read through the character charts and students take notes on the character they've chosen. (I go through them with the students to verify that the notations are in the correct category. I also do this because I teach a variety of levels, and some classes have written more information on the charts than others.)

On the third day I ask students to begin writing their character analysis papers, using information from the charts. Students may decide for themselves how they want to structure their analysis of the character. One student, for example, might begin by describing a character's interaction with other characters and then explain in detail how personality traits impact the interactions. Another student might focus primarily on strengths and weaknesses in explaining the character's actions and interactions.

Students must use dialogue from their texts to back up their statements. I place the charts around the room for the students to use as reference while putting together an outline and first draft. I sometimes include an additional day for in-class work on the paper. This has proven to be an effective way to sharpen students' insights into character development, and could be useful with many different novels.

***Judy A. Goldbaum, Hanby Middle School, Wilmington, Delaware***

## Consequences of Creation: *Frankenstein* and *Pygmalion*

I frame my tenth-grade British literature students' experience with *Frankenstein* and *Pygmalion* around the creator/creation relationship.

Victor Frankenstein literally gives life to his creature, while Henry Higgins figuratively gives birth to a new Eliza; both "experiments" result in grave consequences for the creations. Once students have read both works, we engage in a culminating seminar centered on the following questions:

- What does a creator owe his creation?
- Should research be concerned with consequences, or must research be focused on truth and results, with the consequences left to the philosophical, ethical, or religious thinkers among us?
- When does scientific ambition—whether biological or linguistic in nature—go too far?
- Is scientific work—or any work—that is compulsively carried out or conducted in isolation dangerous?
- How does "The Pygmalion Effect"—the notion that we become that which people see us as—function in both these works and in our world?
- Note Eliza's comments that she will always be a lady to Pickering because he treats her as one, while she will always be a flower girl to Higgins because he treats her as one and always will.
- Note the creature's explanation of how and why he becomes vengeful and malicious.

These questions always spark thoughtful comments and invigorating class discussion.

A potential extension activity involves student research on and analysis of a current scientific undertaking within the frame of some of these essential questions. Recent articles on cloning, genetic engineering, hand and heart transplant surgery, and so on, make especially interesting studies.

***Mary Beth Braker, East Chapel Hill High School, Chapel Hill, North Carolina***

# 3 EXPLORATIONS

Teaching and learning opportunities are everywhere, if we know how to look. The activities presented in this section offer innovative ways to help create a sense of classroom community, build research skills, help students apply critical thinking skills to film and television, organize a poetry coffeehouse, and provide real-life language practice to students learning English as a second language.

## Icebreakers Help Build Community

When my seniors set goals for themselves for the year ahead, I decided to set a goal for myself as their teacher. My new goal for the year was to facilitate greater community in our classroom: I wanted to find ways to help us get to know one another and also to encourage everyone to speak in class. To achieve these ends, I decided to use "icebreakers"—prompts that inspire brief, informal verbal responses—at the beginning of every class period.

For the first few class periods, I provided icebreakers that connected with the current lesson plan. For instance, when we began our study of the Anglo-Saxons and *Beowulf,* the icebreaker was: Did you have a hero/heroine when you were a child? Do you have a hero/heroine now?

We started the prompt at one student (not always the same one), moving around the classroom one at a time and allowing each student to speak or to decline. In my classroom, I found that students rarely declined.

Then after the first week or so, I provided index cards and asked students to write their own ideas for icebreakers. I collected the cards and kept them in my desk to use immediately after I checked the roll from the seating chart. After we used a question, I jotted down the date and the class period on the back of that card to avoid duplicating the questions in subsequent class periods.

Sometimes the questions that I drew were not appealing to the class;

after the first two weeks, I learned to read the question and ask "Thumbs up or thumbs down?" If the question netted a thumbs down, I returned the card to the pile and drew another.

Some of the questions we used included:

1. What is your favorite place to eat?
2. When the sacker asks you "paper or plastic?" which do you choose? Explain.
3. What is your favorite color?
4. Where were you born?
5. What was your favorite childhood movie?
6. What kind of weather do you like best?
7. What do you do on days when school is cancelled because of bad weather?
8. What is your favorite animal? Why?
9. What is your favorite hobby?
10. What is your favorite thing to do in your spare time?
11. Who is your favorite actress or actor? Why?
12. Who is the most important influence in your life right now?
13. What is your favorite movie?
14. What was the most trouble you got into as a little kid?
15. If you had been born the opposite gender, what would your name have been?
16. What is your favorite snow cone flavor?
17. What is your favorite article of clothing?
18. What is your favorite food?
19. Who is your hero? heroine?
20. Who is your favorite comic book character?
21. What do you do on weekends?
22. What is your favorite car or dream car?
23. Do you have a job?
24. What is a nickname people call you? Why?
25. What is the best vacation you ever took?

This activity took five to eight minutes for quick answers from the class, and it improved the classroom climate as I had hoped it would.

Students enjoyed learning more about their peers in this way, and they learned more about me as well—my students insisted that I answer the questions too. And when students worked in small groups throughout the year, they benefited from the sense of community we had gained.


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At the end of the semester, before students began a final exam, one student asked: "Do you think we can finish in time to do our icebreaker at the end of class?" This proved to me that the activity had been a success.

***Freeda Jobe Richardson, Norman High School, Norman, Oklahoma***

## Nobel Laureate Research Project

I've been teaching high school English for three years. I discovered early in my first year that the existing school curriculum didn't contain any lessons relating to Nobel Laureates, and I thought this would make a valuable research project, so I created the following project and began including it in my classroom. Every year I find that my students thoroughly enjoy both the work involved and sharing with their classmates the knowledge they have gained.

I limit the project to research on those who have won a Nobel Prize for Literature or Peace, however, you may choose to include any one or all of the six Nobel Prize fields.

As an introduction , I first discuss the life and philosophy of Alfred Nobel and the Nobel Foundation itself. (I also show a video clip of one of the Laureates being interviewed, which I taped from the TV show *60 Minutes*.) I then help the students select a Nobel Laureate for their research project from a list of Nobel Prize recipients. The Nobel Museum site at http://www.nobel.se/index.html provides a great deal of interesting information, and the search engine at http://www.nobel.se/search/laureate.html allows you to search for either a short or a detailed list of all Nobel Laureates in a particular field.

You may choose to have students work individually or in pairs. I give students the list of guidelines below. It may help some students to brainstorm ideas for the visual aids as a class.

### The Project Criteria

Choose one Nobel Laureate who received the Nobel Prize for his or her outstanding work in Literature or in Peace. Research information can come from such sources as the Internet, encyclopedias, books, and magazines.

1. Prepare a visual aid on your chosen Nobel Laureate. This might be a collage, poster, brochure, booklet, or some other document that presents information in a visual format. Include pictures and appropriate quotations by or about the Laureate and his or her work. Also include the following information as part of this piece:

A short biography of the Nobel Laureate
Country of origin
Language written in
Name(s) of his/her important works
Year of winning Nobel Prize
Special characteristics, style, etc. of his or her work

You must cite at least three sources of information, and remember—both neatness and creativity count!

2. Prepare an oral presentation of three to five minutes to give to the class. Use your visual aid as part of your presentation. Include the following information:

A short overview of the Nobel Laureate's life and work.
Country of origin and the year the Prize was won.
Name(s) of important works by the Nobel Laureate.
A short description of one significant example of his or her work.

This project gives students practice in conducting research and in public speaking, and it also introduces them to the accomplishments of some very special people. As an enhancement to the presentations, consider allowing interested students to do extra research into the life, culture, and historical time period of their chosen Laureate, and to bring in suitable props or articles of clothing on the day of their presentation.

***Dee Brastad, Southridge High School, Kennewick, Washington***

## How to Watch a Movie

"Mr. Floyd! You've ruined movies for me forever!"

I hear this ironic lament a week or two after my film study every year. Yes, I do watch films in my classes, and although I know this may be frowned upon by some, in my classroom we study film as we

study literature.

After immersing my students in the archetypal hero's journey for at least the first four weeks of instruction, making certain we share a vocabulary for identifying the hero's departure, initiation experiences, descent, journey to hell, rise, and return, I use the following method to address the student complaint, "You're just making this stuff up. The author or director never put all that stuff in there."

My goal in teaching film analysis is to convince my students that meaning relevant to their lives imbues art, especially literary art. They can actually find a richer quality life by reading literature and viewing art.

I begin with William Costanzo's *Reading the Movies: Tweve Great Films on Video and How to Teach Them* (NCTE, 1992). I break down his film elements into:

Light, which includes color, black and white, full, low, high, side, back, and front lighting

Sound, which includes dialogue and sound effects

Camera, which includes framing, shots, angles, position, and movement.

My film of choice with which to initiate my students into the wonderful world of film analysis is Frank Darabont's *Shawshank Redemption,* an adaptation of Stephen King's novella, "Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption." This film contains all the nuances of the mythical hero's journey and all the elements of film impeccably applied, creating a memorable, complex, and compelling story.

Since not everyone has seen the film, I show it all the way through the first viewing, giving my kids guided viewing questions so that we can discuss the story, much as we do a novel or short story. After our discussion of characters, plot, setting, conflict, and theme, we analyze the film through archetypes of the hero's journey, and once we know these elements of the story, then we are ready to understand how the director conveys meaning through the use of film elements of light, sound, and camera.

I take the students slowly through the process, showing them such details, for example, as those found in the courtroom scene, especially the full front-lighted close-up of Andy Dufresne on the witness stand. He is wearing a blue suit (blue signifying truth, honesty, loyalty), and behind him to his right is the American flag (signifying justice and freedom), and to his left is a Corinthian column (signifying law, sta-

bility, and strength). Andy's testimony swears he is innocent, and the director's framing of the shot confirms that innocence. Even though at this point we do not know the story's outcome, Darabont has given us clues enough to know about Andy's character.

I walk through about five of the scenes in this manner, such as Andy's arrival in prison, Brooks's parole, Brooks's "escape," tarring the roof, and the Elmo Blatch scene. I take my time and theirs to point out every detail in every scene, discussing each detail's significance and its connection to the story. I then open it up to the students to discover these elements in other scenes. Next, each student and a co-analyst must choose a scene to analyze, writing up their findings to present to the class.

Finally, I assess their grasp of the method by having them write an analysis of the prison yard scene, which I will do for you here.

The scene fades in from black to show Andy sitting on the ground with his back against a black-gray granite prison wall. He has just been released from solitary, the archetypal nadir of his hero journey. Red approaches, and their dialogue centers on Andy's hope of freedom, which Red warns him are "shitty pipe dreams."

My most perspicacious students connect this line with Andy's escape, which we are shown later in the film through flashbacks. Andy then tells Red that a man only has two choices in life, "Either get busy living, or get busy dying." Their conversation winds down as Andy tells Red about a hayfield in Buxton where he proposed to his wife. Andy tells Red that if he should ever get paroled, he must promise Andy he will go to the hayfield, find a rock fence, find a chunk of obsidian in that fence, and take what is buried under that rock.

The meaning of this scene is enhanced through Darabont's use of camera, framing, sound, and lighting. As the scene opens, we are shown a medium distance shot of Andy and Red with their backs against the wall, obviously signifying they are trapped, their backs literally up against a wall. As the camera closes the distance, the only sound is dialogue, until Andy begins talking about hope; then, the music becomes hauntingly evocative, almost dreamy. As Andy finishes his words about hope, saying, "Either get busy living, or get busy dying," he rises and walks away from the wall, leaving Red there.

Darabont slices this scene diagonally in half with the wall's shadow. Such slicing by the light, symbolizing hope, indicates that the wall, symbolized by the shadow, is penetrable. Andy steps into the light while Red stays in the shadow. The camera moves around to Andy, who is telling Red about Buxton, and behind Andy, also in the light,

are signs of life-other prisoners walking, talking, throwing a baseball. If not for Andy's prison number and our memory of the story, we would have no indications that Andy is in prison.

As Red asks Andy what's under the rock, the camera pans back to him still in the shadows, and behind him we see that cold, dead, black-gray granite (aren't tombstones made of granite?) wall. From dialogue and music, from lighting and framing, from camera shots and motion, Darabont impresses on us that hope lives in Andy but has died in Red, a recurring idea throughout the film.

We finish our film study, as I do all my lessons about art, with the story's relevance to our lives. Here we discuss the story's theme, which is given to us by Andy: "Hope is good thing, maybe the best thing, and no good thing ever dies."

I ask students to relate to this idea of hope in their lives. Do you have hope? What do you hope for? Have you ever lost hope? What is the source of your hope? What are some of the Shawshanks in your life? Who are some of the Andys, some of the Reds?

The majority of my students write about Andy and Red as types, with Andy being the hero who becomes the mentor who inspires Red to believe and to first begin and eventually succeed on his own journey toward hope and freedom. Many of them confess they experience times of hopelessness, yet they find strength through friends and hope in faith.

Of all the lessons I provide my students, this lesson on film analysis is the richest, for it allows me the hook I need to grab my students' attention, and then successfully convinces them that meaning does lie within art and that analysis of the details is worthwhile, as it reveals that meaning to us.

***Charles Floyd, Akins High School, Austin, Texas***

## If You Can Watch It, You Can Rate It

Most students spend at least some of their evenings with their eyes glued to the television set, so why not turn this into a learning opportunity? I ask my students to watch two television shows, note the television rating provided at the beginning of the show, consider the content in terms of the rating, and write an essay that discusses these issues.

Here's the handout I give to students:

## Television Ratings Analysis Essay

**Introduction:** If you watch television, you have most certainly noticed the television rating in the top left corner of your television screen. It appears at the very beginning of a television show and then disappears after the first minute or so.

What does the rating mean? What is the basis for the rating? How accurate is it? Do viewers understand the rating system?

These questions and many more are viable questions as we move ahead into a time when television is used as a babysitter for young children; a time when the boundary line between reality and fantasy is becoming more and more unclear; and a time when televisions shows include more sexual situations and mature language than ever before.

**Purpose of the Essay:** The purpose of this essay is for you to examine two television shows with a critical eye in regard to the rating applied to that show.

**Rating Scale:** A copy of the rating scale used to rate television shows is attached. You can learn more about the television rating system from the PTA web site at http://www.pta.org/programs/nbcguide.htm.

**Directions:** Watch two television shows. Make note of the rating of each show. As you watch the show, refer to the rating guidelines. Critically exam whether or not the rating applied was accurate, appropriate, adequate, and advantageous.

Were there scenes in the show containing violence, sexual innuendoes, or language that you believe should have carried a higher rating? If so, the rating applied might not be *accurate.* Do you think the material seemed too mature for the age group recommended for these shows? If so, the rating might not be *appropriate.* Likewise, the rating could be too harsh. Is the scale *adequate?* Maybe the scale is too harsh or too easy. It could be that you believe the TV14 rating needs to include stricter guidelines. Lastly, was the rating *advantageous?* Did it help the viewer in any way?

### *The Four "A" Words*

**Accurate:** this means the tv show met the guidelines of the rating as described in the guidelines

**Appropriate:** In your opinion, is the tv show appropriate for the audience the rating system says it is appropriate for?

**Adequate:** Is the overall rating system adequate? Are there enough rating designations? Does the ratings system "do the job?"

**Advantageous:** Was there an advantage to knowing the rating? Was it helpful to you? Would it be helpful to a parent in selecting suitable material for their child?

**Starting to Write:** When you have watched your two television shows with a critical eye and have the rating guide handy, then you should be ready to start writing.

Remember that this is an essay—you will need to write an "introduction" that introduces the purpose of your essay, names the two shows that you watched, and refers to the rating system. In your "body paragraphs," you will need to address the four "A" words—accurate, appropriate, adequate, and advantageous. Remember to address each of those concepts for each of the two shows you watched. Finally, you will need to write the conclusion in which you bring your paper full circle by referring back to what you wrote in your introduction and making your final point.

**Additional requirements:** You must include examples from the two television shows in order to support your reasoning. Your essay may be handwritten, but a word-processed essay is preferred. Lastly, your essay should be a minimum of 750 words.

This exercise is effective because students are writing about something they know—television—yet they're asked to think more critically about it than they usually do, and to consider the content of what they watch, in addition to the maturity level.

If students are willing to read their essays aloud to the class and you have time, these sessions can provoke lively discussions about what is appropriate subject matter and language for children at various ages.

And contrary to what you might expect, not all teenagers think they should be free to watch whatever they want—some believe that teenagers are exposed to too much adult material on television and that more limits are in order. Use this exercise to start a debate, and the whole class will benefit from an exchange of views on a very current topic!

***Leslie M. Bradley, Century High School, Ullin, Illinois***

## How to Organize a Poetry Coffeehouse

A poetry coffeehouse is always a popular project—it lets students take ownership of poems—their own poems as well as poems by their favorite poets—in a special way, and provides a literacy activity that the classroom community can share with other students, teachers, and even parents. Of course the selection and performance of the poems themselves is the most fun for everyone, but because the planning spreads over several weeks or months, it's important to be as organized as possible.

Here are the steps that helped me plan a poetry coffeehouse with a minimum of confusion.

To allow adequate time for set up and clean up, and to allow all students the chance to read, I use class periods on two subsequent days. Each student is allowed to invite a peer and a parent to the event each day. We also invite other teachers and students in the building to attend to listen or share poems.

I ask each student to serve on a committee. In addition, each student must select one original piece of poetry written during the year and a favorite published poem to read at the coffeehouse.

I divide my class into committees, each of which has a specific task. These groups report their decisions to me for approval, and are asked to be able to defend their choices. Each group also has a spokesperson who communicates with other groups when collaboration is necessary. Possible committees include:

**Physical arrangement:** Where will the podium be located? Will listeners sit on the floor or in *chairs? at tables or in a circle? Where will the food be located?*

**Decorations/ambiance:** This could include tablecloths (one class chose paper ones that guests *could write on), flowers, candles, miniature lights, instrumental background music, and so on.*

**Food:** Determine the type and amount of food and drinks needed. Recruit volunteers from the entire class. Arrange for items such as coffee pots, ice, serving trays, etc.

**Communication:** Design invitations to deliver to guests. This group also acts as greeters who take passes from students, seat parents, and so on.

Students are required to complete two readings—one of their own work and one of a published poet. We read in small groups and in front of the whole class, practicing using the microphone. Enunciation, diction, volume, and timing are emphasized. Students also determine whether they need to "introduce" their poem with a dedication or explanation of some sort.

On presentation day, I make sure to have plenty of students on hand who are available to set up and tear down the media center where we meet.

Also, I arrange for the first two presenters to be students who are strong, confident readers, so that they can start the performance off confidently and model reading etiquette for those who follow.

For the remaining line-up, students were encouraged to read either at a point when they felt comfortable or after a related piece was read. The class decided in advance where and when the food would be available—during entry, on individual tables, during a break, from servers, etc.

Following the performance, students evaluated both the group work and the coffeehouse as a whole, giving suggestions for improvement. In addition, they wrote thank-you notes to guests and to school staff who assisted the class.

## Hints and Tips

- Have students practice in class with poems they *do not* plan to share. This will keep the actual coffeehouse experience fresh for them.
- Allow for class personality to shine. I had one "root beer float house."
- Preview student work and published poems. I approve *several* for each student so that they can have "spontaneous choice" at the event.
- Be prepared for lulls between readings.
- Have some of your own work or your own favorite poems ready to read, too.
- I give participation credit for the two readings, but I do not "grade" the reading of the poems. This seems to remove the stress. Students can self-evalaluate.

Fostering a writing/sharing classroom throughout the year will make this more enjoyable for students.

There were many surprises that arose from this activity, which proved its worth: some students read poems dedicated to family members in the room, much to their delight; several students began writing poems during and after the coffeehouse, inspired by hearing others read; others had not planned to read but were inspired to look for poems in the media center and read them later in the performance.

Staff members who came to listen the first day returned the second day with poems to read, and parents enjoyed the readings so much that many requested that we produce a class anthology.

Among the benefits of this activity are that it shows poetry to be meaningful, valued communication, and that it provides a stage for students' voices. It also allows students to branch out from classroom sharing to sharing with a larger group of friends and relatives, which helps foster pride and confidence. And the planning stages and debriefing process help students to solve problems and think critically.

***Lynn M. Angus, Lakota Ridge Junior School, West Chester, Ohio***

## Househunting with ESL Students

This activity is suitable for high school, college level, and adult students who are learning English as a Second Language (ESL). Working in pairs using a Sunday real-estate supplement to a major newspaper (preferably local), students practice scanning for information and then report their findings to the class. Among the many benefits are that students work in a real-world scenario with authentic materials; broaden their vocabulary; and become more familiar with North American ideas of house and home (size, suitability, features, expectations in relation to price) that may differ from those of their home countries.

Here are the guidelines for teachers:

### Step 1 (5 minutes)

Introduce the Sunday real-estate supplement of the newspaper to students: review its purpose, structure, and marketing viewpoint. A real estate section typically contains ads for individual homes for sale, ar-

ticles about specific home builders/contractors, articles about realtors, and articles about different subdivisions around the city. Distribute individual pages of the supplement to each pair of students; be careful to coordinate individual pairs' assignments with the authentic material given them.

## Step 2 (10–12 minutes)

Give each pair of students a specific assignment, such as one of the following:

- Look for a 3-bedroom, 2-bath house for under $200,000. If you find several, which one sounds best and why?
- Check the standard features in new homes built by several different contractors. Which contractor sounds the best and why?
- Find the least expensive house in [name] subdivision that has a 3-car garage as a standard feature.
- By looking over various contractors' standard features lists on new homes, what do you think they feel Americans want in a new home?
- Find the most expensive home you can. What features seem to make it more desirable? Do these features justify the price? Do you think the price reflects the neighborhood or subdivision in which the house is built? Why?

Encourage the students to decide what key words in each assignment will help them find what they are looking for (for example, *$200,000; standard features; garage;* etc.) and then to scan for those words, being careful not to read anything in detail at first. Because a full page of newspaper text is a lot of reading, they will see the value of not reading for detail when they have a time limit and a specific purpose.

There are different levels of difficulty in these assignments, and that is intentional. This exercise is meant to increase student confidence, not test performance.

The easier assignments should be directed to the less confident students so that they gain confidence, and the more difficult assignments to the stronger students, so that they remain challenged.

As the teacher, your role in this exercise is that of facilitator. Move around the classroom answering questions by directing the students'

attention in certain directions (rather than answering point-blank) and giving them ideas about how to proceed. Giving vocabulary definitions is discouraged to see how well the students manipulate meaning in context. You may also help less verbal students begin talking to their partners and relaxing into the assignment.

## Step 3 (5 minutes per pair)

After scanning and discussing together, each pair will present its assignment and its information to the class. Within that report they should define any terms that they have figured out that would be useful to the class in this context. There is not a single designated speaker for each report—both students should contribute. Other students, as well as the teacher, are welcome to ask questions and to ask for clarifications. The focus at this stage is on interactive communication.

I used the *Houston Chronicle* for this assignment in a low-intermediate class at Rice University School of Continuing Studies Intensive English Program with good success.

The textbook topic for that week was *American Lifestyles* and I felt that what Americans value in housing would be a useful aspect of that topic. The students were very interested in the present focus on large master suites in new homes in the Houston area and this led to a further class discussion of what is useful and important in a home and what is simply a waste of space.

We discussed how homes are measured in ads—by number of bedrooms and baths, by square footage and what that is—and some students were amazed at the square footage of homes considered "small" by American standards.

At first, the students were intimidated by the unfamiliarity of the authentic material. However, once they had finished the assignment, they were proud of themselves for being able to make sense of it. This confidence-building aspect of the assignment was something I hadn't anticipated but was very happy to see.

***Dorothy A. Fontaine, Wakefield School, The Plains, Virginia***

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